



Student Performance Q&A:

2006 AP® Art History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2006 free-response questions for AP® Art History were written by the Chief Reader, Joy Sperling of Denison University in Granville, Ohio. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

This 30-minute question asked students to identify fully two works of art (at least one work had to be from beyond the European tradition) and to explain how and why each work used representations of the natural world or motifs from nature. The question did not ask for a description of each work of art. It did ask students to think critically and use knowledge in an active way to explain how natural forms were used and to argue why they were used in specific works of art—perhaps in ways the students had not considered before entering the exam room. (This was the first year in which the possible topics of this question were not announced in advance.)

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.18 out of a possible 9 points, meaning that the question was average in difficulty. This compares to last year’s mean score of 4.77. This is the ninth year of the “art beyond the European tradition” question, the first year that the possible topics were not announced in advance, and the first year that the question was placed at the beginning of the free-response section of the exam. Taking all of this into consideration, student performance was heartening. Most students were able to find one work of art from beyond the European tradition to include in their essays. On the other hand, there were so many students who used examples from the traditional canon, and relatively few good choices from Africa, the Americas, or other non-European areas, that examples truly from beyond the European tradition were not as frequent as in the past. Unfortunately, poor choices led to students earning mediocre scores, with many clustered in the middle range. A few students earned excellent scores, but many scores were low.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Most students gave two examples of natural imagery in the general sense, but many failed to identify works of art with any specificity. The terms “stupa” or “mosque” are not identifications. Students need to learn to identify works of art by name, or at least by specific religious, geographic, political, or cultural context, and they need to have some sense of historical context. A lack of understanding of the role that the natural world or motifs from nature actively play in a work of art (as opposed to what they look like in the work—i.e., description) was also prevalent and problematic. Students who earned higher scores read the question carefully and explained *why* and how nature was used; those who earned a lower score simply described natural forms.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

The best students are both interested and engaged in their learning; they seem to have studied another culture actively and are thus able to answer this question easily. Some teachers are clearly covering at least one culture beyond their own in depth and with great skill. These teachers and their students are to be commended very highly. There are no short cuts to earning good scores on this question. Students who had not studied another culture in depth could not analyze, so their essays included description rather than analysis, a lack of specificity in identification, and, in some cases, a lack of understanding of what “the natural world” really means. In some cases in which the same examples from Ancient Egypt came up again and again (technically Ancient Egypt qualified as beyond the European tradition for this question, but the ancient works are more often than not taught as part of the canon), students tended to present the same old information that they probably learned in first grade, without even attempting to engage significantly with Egyptian culture. Their essays were weak, and they did not seem to truly comprehend *why* they were choosing to write on Egyptian art and culture. Art beyond the European tradition is part of the curriculum for this exam. If it is not taught and/or studied, both qualitatively and quantitatively, a student’s course work is incomplete.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This 5-minute question asked students to analyze some of the art historical characteristics of a Medieval mosaic by looking back in time and analyzing the Classical sources in it. There was no identification component to this question, so students did not have to locate the work in a specific time or place. On the other hand, they were asked to look carefully at, and think carefully about, a work of art that most knew to be Medieval and to seek out PAST vestiges of Classical sources—visual, thematic, symbolic, religious, and/or cultural. Many students are very familiar with the Classical world, but fewer are familiar with Medieval art. They were expected to bring knowledge to the question and use it actively. By asking students to look back to Classical art, this question also invited them to think about art history as a continuum, rather than an artificial construct of “artistic progress.”

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.45 out of a possible 4 points, suggesting that this question was difficult for students. The best students performed very well, but many performed poorly. Part of the problem may have been that Medieval questions always score rather low (this compares to last year's mean score of 1.67 for a Romanesque question), but it seems more likely that the issue had more to do with student ability. This year's essays broke very obviously into upper and lower scores. Students earning lower scores tended simply to describe the slide on the screen, while students earning upper scores went beyond mere description to link specific characteristics of Classical art to specific aspects of the image on the screen. There was not much middle ground: students either understood the question or they did not. Some students found the concept of working backward, rather than forward, in art history very difficult to grasp.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students recognized the work of art and began to answer the question they *wished* they had been asked, not the one they had actually been asked. They saw the image and simply listed all characteristics of Early Christian art that they could remember. Despite the fact that this was actually a relatively easy question, since most students know quite a lot about Classical art and could identify this work, many earned almost no points. They simply ignored the question, or—because they have been too passive in their thinking about art history—they could not twist their mind around a question that asked them to think about Classical art while looking at Medieval art.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

This question raises three important issues for both students and teachers. First, many students could have earned much higher scores had they read and answered the question asked. Second, art history is a discipline that teaches skills at the college level, so students must be able to take bodies of knowledge (in this case about Classical Art and the *Good Shepherd* mosaic) and draw inferences from thoughtful comparisons—not just visual, but historical, cultural, and functional comparisons, and not always easy or obvious comparisons. And third, art history is a continuum that stretches in many directions in many ways. Vasari may have written about the idea of “artistic progress” in the 1600s, but no one really thinks in those terms today. We can look backward in art history as well as forward. A lot of students might have earned much higher scores on this question had they thought more about these three points.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to name and date the *Kritios Boy* (circa 480 B.C.E.), to explain how the sculpture differed from earlier sculptures in the same tradition, and to support their explanation by comparing it to one other earlier sculpture. The first part of the question was a simple identification of a major work of art. The intent was to have students discuss the *Kritios Boy* as a significant transitional work compared to earlier *kouros* sculptures. Thus, knowledge of the name (as a specific *kouros*) and date (as around 480 B.C.E. or as described by some major historical events or movements of the time) were important in order to contextualize the piece. Students were expected to use knowledge actively to explain visual change.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.62 out of a possible 4 points. Students found the question moderately difficult. They were asked to name and date the sculpture and compare it to an earlier sculpture from the same culture. Some students seemed overwhelmed by these tasks, while others performed all of them easily, naming and dating the work with a moderate degree of accuracy and ably comparing it to an earlier Greek sculpture. If students knew that this was a significant transitional sculpture, they earned very high scores because they had no trouble comparing it to earlier sculptures; if they did not recognize the work's significance, they lost their chronological bearings and earned very low scores. Scores tended to be either very high or very low with relatively few in the middle range.

What were common student errors or omissions?

On a positive note, almost every student recognized the sculpture. On a negative note, after recognizing it, many students did not know why it was significant. Many students had a limited understanding of the nature of change within Greek sculpture over time as reflected in the *kouros* figure, and many could not date it, even in the broadest contextual terms. Since the *Kritios Boy* was a pivotal work of ancient art, and its date (even in the broadest sense) critical to being able to answer this question, students who could not locate it in history earned very low scores. Likewise, the large number of students who did not locate the sculpture in Greece and compared it to Egyptian figures also earned very low scores. The highest scores were awarded to students who analyzed how this sculpture differed specifically from one earlier sculpture in the ancient Greek world.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Many of the best students recognized this sculpture immediately, knew that it was a significant transitional work in ancient Greek art, and drew from a body of earlier Greek *kouroi* they had studied to analyze how the representation of the male figure had changed from one sculpture to the next. Those students who did not have a solid knowledge of either chronology or of cultural difference, or who did not have the skills to think critically about two images (one drawn from memory), almost always earned very low scores. Students and teachers should keep in mind that art history is the study of art and history (and, one might add, cultures) in equal parts. They should also remember that continual practice in critical thinking through argumentative writing is essential.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to identify the artist and to place the painting shown in an art historical period. The painting was Giotto's *Madonna Enthroned*, circa 1310, a very well-known work of art. It is variously described in the major textbooks as either Gothic or Early Renaissance. Students were to place the painting in the art historical period that made most sense to them, based on the information they brought to the question and on their reasoning skills. Students were expected to bring in information about Giotto, the Gothic period, and the Early Renaissance when

addressing the question, but they had to use their reasoning skills to address it adequately. Thus, either Gothic or Early Renaissance could be part of a full-scoring essay. This was a question that tested skills *and* knowledge.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.71 out of a possible 4 points. Students found the question slightly above average in difficulty. They recognized the artist but could not justify their decision to place the painting in a particular art historical period. If students knew that the painting was by Giotto, they were usually able to construct an argument for its placement in either the Gothic or Early Renaissance period, earning very high scores. If they could not identify the painting, they tended to describe the image and grasp at any visual clue to make an evaluation, earning very low scores. Midrange scores were relatively rare.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The best students made a compelling argument for either the Gothic or the Early Renaissance period and identified the artist as Giotto. This was an interesting question because it asked students to examine the characteristics of two art historical periods and to decide which applied more to this transitional work. The question tested students' knowledge of the artist and of two periods, but it also tested their observational, critical thinking, and reasoning skills. Students were asked to make a judgment call (admittedly within rather narrow parameters) based on knowledge and active reasoning, rather than give a simple absolute answer. Students who could not identify the artist, or who could not locate the artist historically, geographically, or culturally, found this question impossible to answer. Indeed, many such students interpreted the question as an invitation to engage in art appreciation. There was evidence of a lack of knowledge of the basic art historical practice of placing specific works of art in a context (of any kind). A number of students simply looked at the painting, identified a period, and described the characteristics of that period without further reference to the painting. They did not answer the question asked.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

As with all questions on this exam, students should be advised to read the question carefully and answer the question *asked*, not the question they wish that they had been asked. Students need to understand the characteristics of major art historical periods that they study as they are represented in the works of various artists and be able to work with them actively. It is not enough for students to memorize the characteristics of an art historical period. Student responses to this question demonstrated that an active, working knowledge of art history is essential; students with passive knowledge earned very low scores. Students also need to know that art history is not a series of discreet, cleanly separable, static periods but a living, dynamic, fluid enterprise, and that pivotal, transitional artists (such as Giotto, who does not fit neatly into any category or period) can be critical to art history. Finally, this was a question that required students to use all of their art historical skills. They needed to identify an artist (knowledge), examine a specific work of art for characteristics of art historical periods (visual examination and knowledge), and construct an argument (critical thinking and writing). Students need to be practicing all three skills on a regular basis.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this 10-minute question was to have students examine modern architecture from a visual, technical, and functional standpoint. The question asked students to identify the architect, Louis Sullivan, and to analyze how the innovations of the building led to the development of the modern skyscraper. Since the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Building was, and is, a department store, the question required students to analyze how visual and technical innovations, and new display elements in Sullivan’s design, were used in later skyscraper design. Students were not asked to describe the characteristics of the early skyscraper—they had to use and apply their knowledge, not simply repeat it.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.79 out of a possible 4 points. Students found the question average in difficulty. They always perform less well on architecture questions—especially on modern architecture questions—than on other questions, apparently owing to the lack of basic understanding of the concepts of four-dimensional space, plan and elevation reading, function, and so on. Poor illustrations in textbooks and the lack of a variety of views of individual buildings do not help. Despite this, students performed better this year than last year, when the mean score for the architecture question was 1.58. The best students identified Sullivan and could evaluate how the characteristics of the building would lead to the development of the skyscraper, earning a very high score. Those who could not identify Sullivan simply described generic skyscraper characteristics, regardless of date, earning a lower score.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The best essays identified both the architect and the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Building. Many students could analyze how numerous technical and visual innovations of the building led to the development of the skyscraper, but a surprising number also knew that the structure was a department store, and they discussed Sullivan’s functional innovations that related specifically to that purpose (a large building filled with people built in a busy city, etc.). On the other hand, while many students knew Sullivan was the architect, and also knew his maxim “form follows function,” just as many mistakenly thought that the maxim simply meant that he advocated a lack of ornamentation; in addition, others misidentified Sullivan and misidentified the building or placed it in the twentieth century. A number of students were lost completely and simply listed the characteristics of the twentieth-century skyscraper, working backwards to the Sullivan image, or they did not refer to the image at all. Students who described the generic characteristics of a skyscraper earned much lower scores. Since most students know what a skyscraper is, there were few zero scores. On the other hand, students who earned very high scores analyzed how the innovations of this specific building led to the development of the skyscraper, bringing knowledge and critical thinking together.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Architecture is difficult and time-consuming to teach. It is important that students are aware of the major architectural thinkers, practitioners, and theorists of art history, and it is crucial that they know something about architecture in the modern age. Most major textbooks provide inadequate information, illustrations, and context. It is highly advised that teachers supplement this part of the course with additional materials. Students need to be able to understand what buildings look like from many angles and how they appear in plan and elevation. It is recommended that textbooks be supplemented by short architecture texts or photocopies of articles and pictures of buildings. Helpful references can be found on AP Central.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question asked students to attribute an unknown painting to an artist whom they had studied. Students had to support their attribution by comparing the painting shown to one other work by that artist. This is the first time on the AP Art History Exam that students were asked to make an attribution rather than simply to identify an artist. Since Vermeer is a very well-known artist today, it was expected that many students would know his work and would be able to support their attribution through analysis of the work of art on the screen compared to another of his works. As with other questions, the knowledge that students brought to the question could inform their answer, but the quality of their essay was determined by the level of their analysis.

How well did students perform on this question?

Although this was the first attribution question on the exam, students performed quite well overall. The mean score was 1.74 out of a possible 4 points. Students found the question challenging. Many earned very high scores, but a number of students were awarded very low scores. Only a few earned scores in the middle range. Students were both prepared and able in terms of information and skills, or they were not. A number of students who received lower scores did not understand the term “attribute” and simply identified (or misidentified) the painting. In these cases, students usually did not attempt analysis.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students identified the artist as Vermeer, and quite a few argued their attribution persuasively, supporting their argument by comparison with another specific painting by Vermeer. The most common misattribution was Caravaggio. Velázquez was also quite common, and there were wild guesses such as Picasso, Van Gogh, and so on. Students who earned high scores were extremely well prepared and could construct detailed, specific, and critically sound arguments. Students who earned lower scores had little or no basis on which to judge the painting. They seemed not to have confronted an unknown image before and, rather than look at the image and reason through an argument, they simply guessed. If students did not know that the artist was Vermeer, it had been expected that the next logical choice would have been another Dutch Baroque painter, or at least placement of the work in the Dutch Baroque; but the second choice of attribution to Caravaggio and possibly the third to Velázquez suggests that students were not

looking or thinking deductively about distinguishing stylistic traits of an art historical period, region, or style. They were simply grasping at names. Other students did not choose either a specific artist or a specific work with which to compare the painting on the screen; they simply chose a style and listed the abstract characteristics of a period or style without reference to the painting.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

As with question 4, students need to have an active understanding of art historical periods, cultures, and styles to be able to construct specific and logical arguments about works of art. In this question, students had to make a connection between knowledge learned about art in a time and place, knowledge of a specific artist, and active knowledge of the history of Western art in order to construct a meaningful justification for their choice of artist. Students with only a passive knowledge of, for instance, the differences between northern and southern Baroque painting could not support their attribution in this question. The use of “unknowns” is a standard practice in art history. It is used widely in the college classroom and can be very helpful at any level. Short, 5-minute practice attribution questions are a good teaching tool for any topic of study.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this 5-minute question was to place Meret Oppenheim’s *Fur Object* (1936) within the art historical movement of Surrealism and to explain how it represented the movement. Students were not asked to describe or to list the characteristics of Surrealism but to explain how this work specifically represented it. Surrealism is one of the most significant twentieth-century art historical movements, and Meret Oppenheim’s sculpture one of the most significant objects of that movement. This was the only essay question on this exam located fully in the twentieth century, and it should remind students and teachers alike that the modern period is a significant part of the AP Art History curriculum that cannot be ignored or eliminated without serious consequences for students.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.28 out of a possible 4 points. Students found this question extremely difficult. Many earned no points, and many others were awarded very low scores. A few students earned very high scores. It seemed to the Readers that a large number of students had never seen this work of art before, even though it is one of the most important twentieth-century art objects. Some students made good guesses, but most seemed absolutely clueless. A number of students recognized that the work had affinities to the readymade and identified it as Dada. Although this is incorrect, it was decided that this was a more or less reasonable deduction for a high school student (this year at least), so they were given partial credit. If that were not the case, unfortunately, the mean for this question would have been *much* lower.

What were common student errors or omissions?

This work of art is discussed and illustrated in all of the major textbooks. It is one of the most important and certainly one of the most unmistakable Surrealist objects by one of Surrealism’s most important woman artists. There is no excuse for students not knowing this work of art. Yet, many students did not recognize it. Most students did not recognize the object as Surrealist, and very few were able to analyze how the object represented Surrealism. Many students simply identified the object as modern—a period designation, not a movement, and hardly a difficult identification by process of elimination. The range of descriptions might have been humorous had it not revealed such ignorance of modern art. Many of the more able students who did earn higher scores deduced that the object was Dada and made compelling arguments for their conclusions. Thus, while Dada was wrong, it was determined that these students had made “good” errors and they were awarded partial credit. A very few students both identified the object and wrote stellar essays arguing how the piece exemplified Surrealism.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

The lack of knowledge about this object—and the modern period in general, as shown in the responses on this exam—was disconcerting in both its range and depth. Question 7 was a relatively easy question. It required identification of only the term Surrealism. Yet students performed worse on this question than on any other question on the exam. It appears that students are not learning very much about the modern period (nineteenth- and twentieth-century art). Indeed, many teachers admit freely that they do not teach twentieth-century art to their students. Some claim that they “run out of time,” while others admit that they “do not understand” modern art. Neither reason is valid. The modern period is an integral part of the AP Art History course and will continue to appear on the AP Exam. Teachers can find information about planning a syllabus and learning about nineteenth- to twenty-first-century art on AP Central.

Question 8

What was the intent of this question?

This 10-minute question was the one text-based question on the exam. This year there was no slide with the question. Students were to read a text by Baudelaire, “On the Heroism of Modern Life” (a critique of the Paris Salon of 1846); then, based on the information given about the text, its content, their knowledge about the author, and their knowledge of the art history of the time and place in which the text was written, students were to identify and discuss how one work of art reflected Baudelaire’s new approach to art making and his ideas on art and modern life. The question was also intended to encourage students and teachers to consider two key issues. First, students need to be able to read texts and to think abstractly about how they relate to the art theories of the time and place in which they are written. Second, students need to know the differences between the nineteenth-century French concept of the modern and the twentieth-century concept of the modern.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.31 out of a possible 4 points. Students found this question extremely difficult. This was the fifth year of the text-based question, and although students have always struggled with it, this mean score compares unfavorably to last year's mean of 1.64. This is surprising because last year's question, which dealt with Romanticism and was accompanied by a painting by Delacroix, was probably more difficult. This year's group of exam-takers, however, earned lower scores overall. On the other hand, many students easily earned very high scores on this question because they knew who Baudelaire was, knew his statements on modern life, and found ample material in the quotation from which to choose a work of art. These students usually had the skills and ability to think critically about Baudelaire's quotation and how the work of art related directly to it. Many other students, however, earned very low scores because they did not know the material or the artists and lacked the skills or ability to think critically about either.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Since this question had no images and involved much more reading than the other questions, students found it more difficult. On the other hand, they were given several very obvious prompts, including the author's name (Baudelaire), the date (1846), the title of the text ("The Heroism of Modern Life"), and the fact that the piece was a review of the Paris Salon; and several references were made in the text to Baudelaire's suggested subjects for paintings of modern life, such as the theme of the city, its people, the *flâneur*, criminals, prostitutes, the floating world, and so on. Despite this, and contrary to the weight of the last 30 years of art historical scholarship, it seems that many students still think of nineteenth-century art in purely visual terms and of modern art as a purely twentieth-century concept. Many students who earned lower scores paraphrased the Baudelaire text or failed to comprehend its main points. Low scores were also awarded to students who made inappropriate choices and who, despite the prompt of the date (1846) in the title of the quotation, and the dates (mid-to late-nineteenth century) asked for in the question, chose to write about art from the twentieth century, such as Dada, Surrealism, or even works by Jackson Pollock, assuming that the modern period can only describe art of the twentieth century.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

"The heroism of modern life" and "modernity" are among the most important concepts of nineteenth-century French art, and since so many prompts were embedded within this question, and the terminology needed to answer it was provided in Baudelaire's title, students who performed poorly were seriously underprepared. Although they may not have known who Baudelaire was, at least they should have recognized what he was writing about. The quotation's broad interpretation of "modern life" allowed students to choose from a wide range of works of art from an equally wide range of major mid- to late-nineteenth-century artists. The low mean score on this question, in combination with the low mean score on question 7, suggests that relatively few students are engaging in a significant manner with the ideas, concepts, and issues behind nineteenth- and twentieth-century art.

It is important for teachers to understand that the AP Art History course includes the modern period. These areas can be difficult to teach, but there are a number of short, accessible books reviewed on AP Central for reference. Teachers argue that they cannot "get to" the modern period by the end of the year, but they should keep in mind that every one-year course has the same

problem. Any teacher who allows a class to fall behind its syllabus places students in serious jeopardy when they take an exam, and an art history class is no exception. If a teacher thinks there is too much material to cover in class, students need to be encouraged to study independently—this is, after all, an AP course. Independent, active learning is what AP Art History is all about.

Question 9

What was the intent of this question?

This was the second 30-minute essay question. Students were asked to identify two works of art from different art historical periods that included symbolic or allegorical images and to analyze how each work of art used symbols or allegory to convey meaning. Students were not asked to describe the symbols or the allegory embedded within works of art or to compare images. Rather, they were expected to use their knowledge about symbols or allegory in works from different art historical periods to analyze how those symbols or allegories have been used differently in different times and places by artists, patrons, and cultures to communicate meaning.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.33 out of a possible 9 points, indicating that students found this question very difficult. Students usually struggle with the two 30-minute essay questions, but question 1 is usually more difficult for them than question 9. This year, question 9 proved significantly harder. The mean score for this year's question 1, by comparison, was 4.18, and the mean for question 9 in 2005 was 4.25. A number of students earned very high scores by answering the question asked and by using both their art historical knowledge and art historical skills to analyze how symbols or allegory were used. However, a large number of students earned scores in the lower-middle range or lower scores, either because they made inappropriate choices, simply described the works of art chosen, or misunderstood the terms "symbolism" and "allegory." Many students seemed unprepared to write an essay of this length, and a number seemed unable to write about art in any way beyond description.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The 30-minute essay question usually reveals the students who are capable of reading a question accurately, choosing appropriate examples, planning an essay, thinking critically about the question, and analyzing the two works of art chosen with reference to the question, and those who are not. Indeed, a significant number of students earned lower scores because they did not *read* the question, did not answer it, made inappropriate choices, did not fully identify their choices, did not engage in any analysis, or made all of the above errors. In addition, a number of students did not seem to comprehend fully the key art historical terms "symbolism" and/or "allegory." If students simply described the narrative or story of each work of art in symbolic or allegorical terms, or "decoded" the narrative (a very popular strategy this year), they also earned lower scores by necessity. Only students who made two good choices, identified the works, and analyzed how each work of art used symbolism or allegory actively in order to communicate meaning earned higher scores. Students who had practice in essay writing, constructing an argument, and engaging in active argument about works of art were at a distinct advantage.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Students and teachers are advised to work more closely with vocabulary and the concepts behind vocabulary in preparation for the AP Exam. Students who performed extremely well on this question not only knew the terms “symbolism” and “allegory” but were also comfortable using them and understood the concepts in the abstract sense. These students could apply the concept(s) easily and could thus choose examples for their essays judiciously, making the analysis part of the essay (*how* the works of art used “symbolism” or “allegory” to convey meaning) much easier. If students were unsure of the abstract meaning of the terms, they had to rely by necessity on concrete, memorized examples. They usually restated the symbolic or allegorical content as learned and found it difficult or impossible to construct any kind of analytical argument. These students often made inappropriate choices: some used examples drawn from previous AP Art History Exams, trying to retool past essays to conform to this question. This is probably the worst strategy—it is like trying to squeeze a square peg into a round hole.

Students should be encouraged once again to *read* the question, to think, and to plan a response before writing, especially in the longer essay questions. They need to be reminded again and again to answer the question *asked*, rather than the question they wish they had been asked. It is important that students know that they earn no credit for simply writing if what they write is irrelevant to the question asked. The AP Art History Exam involves writing nine essays in two hours, the bulk of the exam. All of the essay questions ask students to **apply** art historical skills and knowledge—they never ask students simply to reproduce what they have learned. Thus, teachers should consider the acquisition of knowledge alone on the part of the students to constitute only half of this course. The skills acquired in thinking critically, building arguments, and actively writing about art are absolutely essential to success in art history at the college level and thus on the AP Art History Exam.